

A SHAKING OF FAITH:  
THE SEARCH FOR AUTHENTICITY IN HISTORICAL FICTION

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Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University,  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts in English.

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A Shaking of Faith: The Search for Authenticity in Historical Fiction

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she wiped the bacon fat from the knife onto a cloth and began to clip the ends of the

green beans. Harriet hummed Wesley's *Thou Hidden Source of Calm Repose* as she

## The Substitute

June 30, 1863

Harriet Apjohn stood up from her row of green beans and rubbed the small of her back. She questioned whether the Independence Day casserole contest at the Methodist Episcopal church was worth winning again. A quiet thunder crept eastward along the Cumberland Valley. Harriet turned to see the horizon darkening. The rumor of Violet Bostwick's yellow bean and walnut recipe was sufficient motivation. One more row, she thought. She pulled up her voluminous skirts and bent low.

By the time she had returned to the farmhouse porch the fat, warm drops had begun to soak into her headscarf. She entered the house and saw her son Mortimer standing next to the fireplace reaching up to place his Bible on the mantle. She thought, is he now taller than Howard was? She supposed he should be at 21. The fire was new and the sap in the pine kindling had just begun to heat and crackle. Mortimer gazed blankly at the small flames.

"Son, what is the matter?" He did not respond right away. Harriet left him to his thoughts and took the bushel into the kitchen. She placed the bushel onto the table and wiped her brow with a kitchen towel. She removed the damp scarf from her head and tossed it onto the back of the chair to dry. The kitchen door stood open allowing the fresh wind from the approaching storm to flood the house and feed the fire. Harriet blotted away the drops from her cheeks. Her shoulders remained wet. After donning her apron, she wiped the bacon fat from the knife onto a cloth and began to clip the ends of the green beans. Harriet hummed Wesley's *Thou Hidden Source of Calm Repose* as she

worked. Mortimer entered the kitchen and joined his mother. He laid a hand on her shoulder as they began the second verse,

Thy mighty Name salvation is,  
And keeps my happy soul above;  
Comfort it brings, and power and peace

Mortimer interrupted the hymn. "Mother, you're wet from the rain."

"It will dry, dear." Mortimer turned away from her but remained in the same spot.

"What is it, Mort?"

"I've asked you to stop calling me that child's nickname." He drew in a long breath. "I will be joining the Union Army to fight the secessionists."

Harriet let the knife slip from her fingers to the floor where it lodged point first into the floorboard. "Son, what of your mission? And why, why have you volunteered? Your father expressly forbade it."

"My mission to Kentucky can wait. And I have followed Howard's instruction."

Harriet sputtered, "I don't understand."

"Did you not see Mr. Clive Fletcher's coach while you were in the field?"

"No, I did not. There was thunder and I took a walk earlier and..."

Mortimer interrupted, "It does not matter. Please sit. I have agreed to be Saul's substitute."

"Substitute for what?" Harriet collapsed to the floor next to the knife. Thunder overhead smothered her anxious heaves.

"Saul Fletcher was notified that he was conscripted a few weeks ago based on the new Enrollment Act."



"I have never heard of it. And what does that have to do with you volunteering against your father's wishes?"

*Dear Mother,*

"I did not volunteer. Clive Fletcher *paid* me to substitute for Saul."

*We are still in camp south of Pittsburgh. While the Appalachian Mountains have some beauty, the sun refuses to appear for days at a time in this part of the country. I miss the sunshine of the Cumberland Valley. But who am I to judge the value of rainclouds compared to blue skies? Our Father has his plan for His Creation. I know how we destroy one another, each of us a blessed creation of the Father. That said, I have not yet discharged my weapon toward the enemy nor has he toward me. (We have not yet seen one another, nor are we likely to any time soon.)*

Mortimer stared at the floor and mumbled, "The remainder of the mortgage."

Harriet pressed her cloth into her eyes, mixing tears, rain, green beans and bacon fat into one ugly sob.

July 11, 1863

*Dear Miss Bostwick,*

*Forgive the following presumptive words. I write in haste. Tomorrow I travel westward to Pittsburgh to join the Union Army to fight the secessionists. I shall return soon. I grieve the fallen at Gettysburg, but I believe their sacrifice will turn the tide of the war and deliver me home sooner rather than later. I know that I have not proposed marriage formally, and I will not do so in a letter that you might feel committed unduly, but dear Violet... I shall be home soon, of that I am sure. Please accept the enclosed cross as a token of my faith and as a sign of my devotion to you.*

*Yours,*

*Mortimer Apjohn*

*Soldiers of Christ, arise, and put your armor on,  
Strong in the strength which God supplies through His eternal Son,  
Strong in the Lord of hosts, and in His mighty power,  
Who in the strength of Jesus trusts is more than conqueror.*

August 1, 1863  
Fayette County, PA

Dear Mother,

We are still in camp south of Pittsburgh. While the Appalachia Mountains have some beauty, the sun refuses to appear for days at a time in this part of the country. I miss the sunshine of the Cumberland Valley. But who am I to judge the value of rainclouds compared to blue skies? Our Father has his plan for His Creation. I bemoan how we destroy one another, each of us a blessed creation of the Father. That said, I have not yet discharged my weapon toward the enemy nor has he toward me. (We have not yet seen one another, nor are we likely to any time soon.)

Have you heard from Robert or Nathaniel about their plans for the mission? Do you know if Clive Fletcher has agreed to fund the trip? I am deeply grieved not to travel with my brothers in Christ and my prayers and thoughts are always with them. I hope that they heeded my advice to wait until the secessionists surrender before embarking. If not, perhaps they will pass our camp on their way to Kentucky.

My letters are all that I have to occupy my mind. We drill incessantly, and when we break from drilling we are instructed to clean our weapons or our boots or some other thing until my mind is completely blank. Wesley's hymns are all I have to keep me company during this boredom. This is one I sing the most, of course, and I write it here knowing that you know it well:

Soldiers of Christ, arise, and put your armor on,  
Strong in the strength which God supplies through His eternal Son.  
Strong in the Lord of hosts, and in His mighty power,  
Who in the strength of Jesus trusts is more than conqueror.

*I have heard rumor that we will be paid on the following Friday at which point I will send you the full amount. I wish you all the love in the world, and I hope to see you soon.*

*With affection and love,*

*Your Son,*

*Mortimer Apjohn*

August 1, 1863  
Fayette County, PA

*Dear Miss Bostwick,*

*My mother informed me that your Independence Day casserole was delicious and victorious. Congratulations are in order. More importantly, I understand from my mother's recent letter that you have begun organizing and leading house meetings for the Methodist Episcopal ladies in Carlisle. That is a wonderful renewal of mother's program she ran when I was a child. Did she tell you of the Female Moral Reform Society she ran in Philadelphia in the '40s?*

*Conditions in camp are unpleasant and I will spare you the details.*

*I remember fondly our conversations of Scripture and Methodist texts on Sunday afternoons, and I hope that those pleasant days will resume soon. I ponder the debates of General Conference from this century. Violet, I weep that the Bible might be used to justify one human owning another especially within my beloved M.E. church.*

*While you wait for me to return know that this Wesley hymn is on my mind:*



*Peace, doubting heart! my God's I am;  
 Who formed me man, forbids my fear;  
 The Lord hath called me by my name;  
 The Lord protects, for ever near;  
 His blood for me did once atone,  
 And still He loves and guards His own.*

*I wish you and Mrs. Bostwick and Mayor Bostwick all the best.*

*Sincerely,*

*Mortimer Apjohn*

The congregants of the Carlisle Methodist Episcopal Church poured out of the sanctuary into the churchyard like a swarm of angry bees. The men and women separated into their groups quicker than usual. The agitation and excitement of the groups respectively was palpable.

Two hours before, the church had been packed to the rafters with Methodist Episcopal church members, as well as local Presbyterians, Episcopalians and Baptists, eager to hear the famous married preachers, Walter and Phoebe Palmer. Though Carlisle was not tiny, it was not usually on the circuit of the most successful of the nation's traveling preachers.

Violet waved a fan in front of her face as she leaned closer to Harriet. She whispered, "Mrs. Apjohn, will you look at how the older Mr. Fletcher flails his arms. He is downright angry. It is a disgrace and an embarrassment to our church."

Harriet smiled and said, "I suspect Mrs. Palmer has heard similar comments in her career." Both women chuckled lightly and then grew quiet as they listened to Clive Fletcher's ranting:

"What was it she said, son?"

Saul Fletcher responded too quietly for Harriet and Violet to hear.

"No, that wasn't it. It was '...whose pent up voices have so long, under the pressure of these man-made restraints, been uttered in groanings before God.' And that other phrase, 'How long, O Lord, how long before man shall roll away the stone that we may see a resurrection?' That's ridiculous! When your mother was alive she could read the Gospel text just as readily as I."

Harriet turned her back to Clive Fletcher's rant; Violet followed. They walked slowly together through the yard for a few minutes before Violet began, "I noted on my pamphlet my favorite of Mrs. Palmer's quotes today. Do you remember when she said, 'The church is a potter's field where the gifts of woman are buried'?"

"A harsh critique of our Brothers in Christ, but not untrue, I should say. I've often felt I could do more."

"But haven't you? Mortimer- Mr. Apjohn wrote in his recent letter that you were the leader of the Female Moral Reform Society in Philadelphia in the '40s." Harriet paused briefly in mid-stride and glanced sidelong at Violet. "What is it, Mrs. Apjohn? Have I offended you?"

"No, Miss Bostwick. It's just that, that isn't true. I do not believe that Mr. Apjohn would lie intentionally to you. He must be mistaken somehow. The late Mr. Apjohn and I have never been to Philadelphia in our lives. When I was younger I was part of a ladies' group here in town that had house meetings, but they were more of an excuse to gather for fellowship than to engage in any social action."

They walked along in confused silence for a few minutes before Violet broke it. "Perhaps Mrs. Palmer might like to stay to speak to our Wednesday meeting. Would you be willing to host her, Mrs. Apjohn? After all, you have plenty of room in your house now that—" Violet raised her gloved hand to her mouth and gasped. "I'm so sorry, Mrs. Apjohn. That was so unkind of me. Can you forgive me?"

"It's all right dear, I forgive you. And I am willing to host Mrs. Palmer if she stays in Carlisle."

August 15, 1863  
Cumberland County, PA

Dear Mortimer,

Thank you for your recent letter you sent to me on August 1. I hope you are well and the tedium of camp life is becoming more bearable. Perhaps you have formed new friendships that have helped pass the time in the weeks since you last wrote. With that said, I prefer your boredom to excitement that one typically associates with a soldier's life.

The farm has done quite well this year, which is a great blessing. You and I had much anxiety when you left, but the farmhands you hired have done marvelous work with the beans, the corn, and the apples from the orchard. Sadly, though, I may have only made enough profit to pay their wages. Even if that is so, the farm will be in good shape and ready for you and for the future Mrs. Violet Apjohn when you return from the war.

There has been some unusual excitement in Carlisle in the last week. The famed Walter and Phoebe Palmer preached at the worship service today. Mrs. Palmer has agreed to stay through Wednesday so that she may speak at Violet's house meeting, and she and her husband will take up residence with me for those days and nights. What a



*thrill! I will give them the master bedroom and move my things into your bedroom for the duration of their stay.*

*Mortimer, I do not know how to broach this topic graciously, so I will be blunt. Why did you tell Miss Bostwick that I led a Female Moral Reform Society in Philadelphia? I have never been to Philadelphia, and even in your father's missionary travels, I do not believe he has either. Please explain this error.*

*I love you with my whole self and I pray for your hasty return.*

*Affectionately,*

*Your Mother,*

*Harriet Apjohn*

The mud at camp was insufferable. The damp had caused rampant pneumonia. Though September snow was not an uncommon annoyance in West Virginia, the immediate heat wave that followed seemed to generate mud three times what one might expect. Mortimer offered a prayer for Adams, whom he had replaced in picket duty, without much feeling. Mortimer did not know Adams. And Mortimer's body was too weary to generate much spirit in his prayer.

Too, he did not mind an extra shift at picket duty. He had recently been promoted to corporal and in that role Mortimer rode behind ten privates as they passed through the wood to the south of Parkersburg, southeast along the Ohio toward Kentucky. Their mission was to scout for possible confederate ambushes. The threat seemed minimal this far north of the Tennessee border. It seemed that the privates under his charge agreed.

Several of those that were on foot stumbled over the smallest fallen branch, and corporals nearby seemed asleep in their saddles.

Leaves fell into the slop as they made their way along a ridge. The picket had split up due to the mountainous terrain. Mortimer ordered his infantrymen to scout the base of the ridge ahead of them. He glanced backward toward the higher ranking officers gathered in knot around Colonel Sykes. He was close enough to see the glint from a bottle passing between them.

He heard blackbird in the distance. And another one closer. Mortimer's horse carried him along the base of the ridge. There was a beaten path at its base. It occurred to him briefly that the path was man-made. The thought passed as he admired the boulders jutting out from the ridge like the tongues of giants. The monoliths looked both permanent and on the brink of extracting themselves from the soil, poised to crush him and his horse.

Another crow cawed.

An owl screeched.

Mortimer delivered a small prayer of thanks for his promotion to officer enabling him to enjoy God's creation on horseback rather than on foot, and then prayed for the infantrymen under his charge that did not have such a comfort. He bowed his head, shut his eyes and whispered Wesley's *And Can It Be That I Should Gain*. He sat there for many minutes pondering the hymn before he sensed the shift in weight as the horse's head dipped. For a moment Mortimer believed that his horse prayed with him. Then he opened his eyes to see an arrow's fletching protruding through his horse's right ear. Buckshot rained down from the trees and obliterated the horse's head and the arrow

lodged in it. Mortimer's last memory of the six-second skirmish was the pain in his left knee and ankle as his horse's weight fell upon it.

Septemer 15, 1863  
Northern Kentucky

Dear Mother,

*My picket company was ambushed by a surprise rebel attack in the woods about 40 miles southwest of Parkersburg West! Virginia, in southern Ohio or Northern Kentucky. My horse was shot dead and I was thrown. Her body weight may have broken my ankle and my knee is also quite sore. Please do not worry as my hosts have been very gracious. The rebels escaped and the kind Mr. Bartholomew has agreed to allow me to stay in his home with himself, his wife and his two sons, until my regiment retrieves me. Based on talk in the home, I have assessed that the Ohio River is to our north. Perhaps Mr. Fletcher could look into the situation.*

*I must say that the food is atrocious. They make do with the venison and herbs they can find in the wood and a bread-like mush called Jonnie bread which tastes like mortar. Peach brandy is served in the evenings, and although it has the name peach in it to me it tastes like turpentine. At the other meals they serve several types of unusual milk. The sour milk helps wash down the Jonnie bread and Jonnie bread helps to mute the unnatural tang of the milk. But in my situation it is not right to complain. Oh, how I miss your green been, bacon, and onion casserole dearest mother. Soon I hope to taste it again. And I look forward to the time when I can partake of Miss Bostwick's casseroles on a regular basis. Please tell her I said so.*



*Regarding your time in Philadelphia, I know not how to respond. I am certain that my father boasted about your wonderful work to me in his final days. In fact, I am sure that he told me he met his life's love in that city. Am I mistaken?*

*Sincerely,*

*Your loving son,*

*Mortimer*

At sunrise on the third morning of having awoken in the Bartholomews' bed, Mortimer reached deep into his blankets to rub his injured ankle.

Knuckles rapped quietly on the door.

Mortimer pulled up his blankets. "Come in."

Mrs. Bartholomew opened the door just wide enough to place the plate of Jonnie bread on the floor. Her hand hovered in the air over the bread.

"Thank you, Mrs. Bartholomew."

She withdrew her hand and shut the door.

On the fourth sunrise Mortimer sat up abruptly at the creaking sound of the door hinges. A spark of pain trickled through his leg. He heard a light tap on the door. Again the Jonnie bread appeared; this time the hand lingered several seconds after his thanks were uttered.

Fifth sunrise. Mortimer's leg itched and twitched. A soft knock and a slim ray of light interrupted his morning slumber. "Sorry to intrude, Mr. Apjohn. Thought you might still be sleeping and I was hoping to retrieve my bedside gospel for morning devotions."

"Certainly, Mrs. Bartholomew. May I hand it to you?"

She took two steps into the room an arm-length away from the bed. Mortimer placed the text into her hand. She pulled a plate of biscuits from behind her back and placed them on the side table. She remained for several seconds before she turned toward the door.

"Mrs. Bartholomew, the biscuits smell like home."

She paused at the threshold. "I like to bake biscuits when Mr. Bartholomew and the boys are out on a hunt."

At lunch she brought cheese and Jonnie bread. She stayed. She sat on a stool in a shadowed corner of the room. Minutes passed in silence as Mortimer attempted to suppress his pleasure. At length he finally said, "I hope to be freed from your bed by tomorrow or the next day. My leg is feeling much better."

"It is nothing, sir." Mrs. Bartholomew's gaze drifted downward.

They remained in silence while Mortimer ate his lunch. "May I have something to drink, Mrs. Bartholomew?" She rose from her stool and slipped out of the room. Several minutes later she returned with a glass of water. She stood next to the bed until the glass was empty.

The sun rose again. Mortimer had lost track of what day it was. His leg itched terribly. He sat up. He was not alone.

"How long have you been sitting there, Mrs. Bartholomew?"

"Your fever has broken."

He devoured the two biscuits that were sitting on the table next to the bed, sprinkling crumbs into his budding beard. Beard? How long had he been in this bed?

He gazed over at his hostess who had a book resting in her lap. "What text are you studying?"

"Mr. Bartholomew has me reading Leviticus at the moment sir."

"My mother chose her own texts when my father was alive. I will allow Violet to do so as well."

Mrs. Bartholomew remained silent for a minute before she whispered, "I read other texts while they are hunting."

She took two steps toward the bed, stopped, and reached her hand out. "Your plate, Mr. Apjohn."

Mortimer finished the rest of the biscuits and mumbled, "Mortimer. Please." He fell asleep before Mrs. Bartholomew shut the door.

"Yes, Apjohn, I delivered your letter. Stop askin' after it."

"You speak to me as if I owe you an apology, but I think it is reasonable for me to be anxious that my family know that I am alive. And have you heard from my regiment?"

"If you mean, has some yankee foot soldier knocked at the door looking for you, the answer is no." Mr. Bartholomew turned and spat his tobacco juice on the floor and muttered. The inaudible rant continued for almost a minute, after which he turned his head up and met Mortimer's eyes with a menacing grin. "How's the leg, son?"

"I suspect that I will be able to bear weight within two days. And I am not your son. I am the son of the late Howard Apjohn, missionary to the Cherokee nation of North Carolina."



Mr. Bartholomew chuckled softly. "Son of a missionary, eh? Preaching the word to the heathens." He chuckled again. "Doesn't matter to me who or what your father was. Tomorrow you will begin to earn your keep, and you'll be out of my bed and you'll be sleeping in the boys room." Mr. Bartholomew walked out of the room. Mortimer reached for the inkwell and paper at his bedside table.

September 19, 1863  
Northern Kentucky

Dear Mother,

*I write to you with great apprehension regarding my rescue. My host, Mr. Bartholomew has informed me that my regiment has not sought after me. Please ask Mr. Fletcher use his resources to inform the Union Army that I am alive. Alas, I do not know my location and I cannot get a clear answer from anyone in the family as to where I might be found. I only know that I am south of the Ohio River.*

Mortimer

"How's the leg this morning, Apjohn?"

"I can walk."

"Then get up. It's time you earned those warm biscuits I hear you've been shoving down that yankee throat." Mortimer's face grew hot with indignation and his stomach roiled with fear that he had been caught acting indecently toward Mrs. Bartholomew.

After putting on his clothes and boots, Mortimer exited the house, closed his eyes, and smelled the sweet smell of fall forest rot. Mr. Bartholomew, Abe, and Rob stood in the yard shotguns crooked dormant on their elbows. With no word uttered, they turned

and walked out into the woods. The hike was a restoration for Mortimer as he stretched his sore leg over fallen trees or bent low under heavy branches.

After an hour they had spread out. Abe and Rob took the flanks hiking about one hundred yards apart. Mortimer and Mr. Bartholomew distributed themselves equally between the faster Bartholomew sons. Mr. Bartholomew communicated to the boys through birdcalls. He heard a blackbird caw from Mr. Bartholomew's direction. Mortimer turned to see Mr. Bartholomew ducking behind a boulder. The boys walked quickly and quietly walked from their flank positions to join their father behind the boulder. Mortimer had no idea what was happening until he saw the bear. A black bear cub had lumbered along the base of the gully. He was almost near the base himself when he heard Mr. Bartholomew's birdcall. Frozen in wonder, Mortimer watched the cub for several minutes, until he heard a growl in the distance down the gully. The growl rapidly increased in pitch. Mortimer realized his danger and ran back to join the Bartholomew males behind the boulder. Rob and Abe were lying on their stomachs on top of the boulder while Mr. Bartholomew sat with his back resting against the lee side of danger. Mortimer peered around the side to witness the reunification of cub and sow.

Minutes passed and the mother's roar persisted. The cub seemed not to heed it. He played in the underbrush for a few minutes, digging up rocks and small logs. At the sound of its mother's shriek, the cub lifted its head. Flesh dangled from its teeth. Dead deer, Mortimer thought. The mother bear hustled her cub away from the rotting deer, and they both ran back down the gully.

Rob swore at Mortimer. "What in the hell were you doin' standin' there gapin' at that beast? It could a ripped yer goddam throat out with one swipe if it thought you was gonna hurt its babe. You dumb pile of shit yankee."

Mr. Bartholomew ignored his son. "As a soldier, I'd have thought you'd be more skilled in the wood, Apjohn. Thought you might be some help out here. Seems you are only fit for hard labor." He turned his head and twitched slightly. He waited a minute before he raised his head and chuckled. "Though I suppose you have been doing hard labor anyway, on account of those biscuits." Abe and Rob roared with laughter, slapping one another on the back so hard that Abe fell down laughing. Mr. Bartholomew pointed toward the dead deer. "That pile of flesh is a danger to my family and my home. Not just bears will come after that, the United States Army will be around soon."

Mortimer straightened in his saddle, twitching slightly at the pain in his ankle. "The United States Army does not eat carrion."

Mr. Bartholomew stared at Mortimer. "If they do not eat carrion, then I do not expect them to eat that. You better go ahead and bury it."

"Why should I bury a dead deer? Just let it rot." The boys laughed again, and Rob joined his brother rolling on the ground. "And what is so damned funny?"

Mr. Bartholomew's face grew grim. "Bury the deer, son. Bury all of the yankee deer, uniforms and all."

"And save any of 'em gold medals," shouted Rob.

"Ha, you ain't huntin'. Pa says yer gonna clean our rifles. Now git to it."



September 23, 1863  
Kentucky

Dear Mother,

I had the honor of burying five comrades that had fallen in our skirmish in eastern Kentucky. Though my captors (I shall no longer call them hosts) coerced me to do so, I was grateful to have the opportunity to retain my fellow officers' medals for their families and I hope to return them soon with the sad news of their demise. They died for Union and their families will be proud. I said a brief prayer for their souls, but I do not know if God is hearing my prayers these days.

I do hope that my letters have reached you. I am eager to continue our discussion about your past career in Philadelphia. I am still very confused. I only have a few moments before Mr. Bartholomew's two beasts he calls sons return to the room. So please give my well wishes to Miss Bostwick.

Do not worry yourself over me, mother.

With sincerest affection,

Mortimer

Mortimer woke up at dawn with a punch in his left rib cage and a hand at his throat. "Woo-hoo, Apjohn. Get up. We're goin' on a hunt, yankee."

The hand released his throat and delivered a sharp jab just under his armpit. Mortimer rubbed his neck and massaged his ribs as he sat up from the floor. "We're going on a hunt?"

"Ha, you ain't huntin'. Pa says yer gonna clean our rifles. Now git to it." Broken pieces of the plate scattered across the floor. The biscuits remained whole. Mrs.

After the guns were cleaned and the Bartholomews were out of earshot, Mortimer rose from the workbench in the barn and climbed up into the hayloft. After an hour he was awakened again from sleep, this time by the point of the toe of a woman's boot.

"They're gone now. Come on back into the house and get some rest. I suspect your leg has not healed properly."

"It does hurt much more than it did before that trip into the wood." He pulled up his knee and rubbed his ankle. "Who was that man I saw carrying buckets in the yard?"

Mrs. Bartholomew did not respond. Mortimer followed her down the ladder and out into the yard. It was raining and cold. He entered the mud pond that they called a barnyard and promptly lost his right boot and fell face first into the filth. That was his last memory before he awoke again in the Bartholomews' bed. It may have been the next day. But he felt no fatigue, and he suspected only a glimmer of pain in his leg. Perhaps it had been more than a day.

Mortimer lowered the blankets and threw his legs over the side of the bed and stood up. His leg held his weight. He moved around the room testing his strength and flexibility. As he neared the door, he bent over to touch his toes. Mortimer allowed the blood to flow to his head. If Colonel Sykes has decided that Mortimer was dead, he would have to find his own way back. He stood up and jumped into the air to test the joint. If Bartholomew would let him go, he might be able to make it to camp on his own.

Mrs. Bartholomew opened the door without knocking. Her eyes were angled toward the plate of biscuits and preserves in her hand. She raised them abruptly as Mortimer jumped back from the swinging door. Startled, she dropped the plate. Broken pieces of the plate scattered across the floor. The biscuits remained whole. Mrs.

Bartholomew flushed deep red from her hairline to the top of her dress. She sputtered, "Mr. Apjohn, I thought, I am sorry, you were asleep--" Mortimer did not hear a word that she had uttered. Why were the top buttons of her dress unfastened? "I'll get the broom." She turned toward the door when Mortimer grabbed her wrist. Mrs. Bartholomew did not pull away. Instead, she turned toward Mortimer, her flush remaining crimson. They pulled toward one another. Preserves seeped between the toes of Mortimer's bare left foot while a shard of plate pierced the skin of the heel of his right foot. He reached his hand toward her neck and slipped it beneath the unfastened buttons.

For lunch Mrs. Bartholomew opened the door a few inches, left the Jonnie bread, and shut the door.

Mortimer emerged from the Bartholomew bedroom in the morning in his long underwear hoping to receive a new batch of warm biscuits and preserves. Instead, he found Mr. Bartholomew and his sons sitting at the kitchen table. Mr. Bartholomew stood up slowly, shotgun in hand.

Mr. Bartholomew walked slowly across the room until he was so close that Mortimer could smell the man's earwax. Mortimer glanced at the kitchen sink, which was void of an occupant. Mr. Bartholomew backhanded Mortimer on the forehead. Mortimer jumped back in shock at the blow. "What are you looking for boy? There are no more biscuits in this house."

"What have you done with her?"

"He's worried about his girlfriend," Abe said and Rob giggled.

Several minutes later the cellar door opened again revealing a sliver of light. He



"Don't you worry your little heart, boy. Now it's time for you to get to work." There's a slop bucket just outside the door."

"Does it got biscuits in it, Pa?" Mr. Bartholomew backhanded Rob across the face, but both boys continued laughing.

"We keep a pig in the cellar out by the barn, and it's now your job to feed it.

"Why do you keep pigs in a cellar?" Another slap. Mortimer rubbed his stinging cheek. The boys roared with laughter. Mr. Bartholomew responded, "Well I don't want anyone to steal them, fool."

"Pa, no one's gonna steal that pig. No one knows he's there." More laughter, and another backhand for both boys.

Mortimer drew on his boots, walked out the door, and picked up the slop bucket. Some of the rotting liquid spilled on the porch and Mr. Bartholomew whacked Mortimer's back with the palm of his hand. "In the cellar boy, on the lee side of the barn."

After a long walk through the sucking mud, Mortimer had lost both boots and one sock. The mud was cold and by the time he had reached the top of the cellar cold had turned to pain. Mortimer turned to see Rob and Abe tossing his boots back and forth at each other trying to muddy the other's face. Mortimer walked slowly down the stairs of the cellar. At the last step, Mortimer turned and yelled, "Have you sent the letters to my mother?" The door slammed and the light shut out. Mortimer sat on the dirt floor and wept. Several minutes later the cellar door opened again revealing a sliver of light. He

saw a dark skirt. Two envelopes floated down toward Mortimer and the door was dropped again, and the outside latch was engaged with a rusty creak.

Mortimer scrambled helplessly for the two papers in the dark. When he could not find them after several minutes he rolled onto the cold dirt and released a croaking sob.

"Sir, I respect your sorrow, but you are not alone."

Mortimer ceased his weeping and spoke, "Who is there?"

"No need to shout. Our space is only ten by ten by six. Might as well be a double coffin. I'm sorry for your plight, but I must admit that I'm glad to have company."

"You haven't answered my question. Who are you?"

"My name is Stephen Duncan of the Cherokee Nation in Kentucky. And yours?"

"Mortimer."

"And your surname, Mortimer?"

"My sin shames me to claim my father's surname."

"Bring that kindling over here so we can start a fire."

"These letters? They are my only hope to--"

"To what, Mortimer No Name? We need heat to survive down here. I can only gather so much in my pockets while I'm out on a job."

Mortimer ran his fingers over the folded edges of the envelopes. His tears of shame ran down his cheeks unnoticed in the dark.

He crawled toward Stephen's voice and handed over the kindling. "Why are you here?"

"The only thing I can think of is trespassing. My hunt must have crossed onto the Bartholomew property and his ignorant pimple faced sons shot me in the leg. Some time

later I woke up down here in the dark thinking that I was in hell. Felt that way for God knows how long before they needed my help on a job. I have been trying to work hard since then, just to get out of this pit for a period of time."

"Where do you start a fire in a cellar?"

"There's a vent. This cellar was built for storage and for long-term shelter in case of a storm or an attack. But there aren't food stores. I can't get my mind around it. Why have a long term storm cellar with no food?"

"Is that what the slop is for? Bartholomew told me there were pigs."

"That's his nickname for me when I don't do my work fast enough for him."

"Was it you that shot my horse in the head with an arrow during the ambush?"

Stephen continued striking his flint. In the brief moments of light from the sparks Mortimer saw his letters at the base of a miscellaneous pile of sticks, leaves, and scraps of cloth. At length, Stephen responded, "They made me do it. I don't even know how to use a bow and arrow. I'm a preacher. But that kid said, 'He an Injun. Giv im an arra.' and that Mr. Bartholomew just chuckled. And so, yes, I was there on that ambush and I shot your horse because I didn't have the aim true enough to hit you. You're lucky to be alive."

"You are a native preacher?"

"Well, I suppose I'm retired now though I have not lived 25 years. But yes, I've been to many of the Methodist Episcopal missions all across the country preaching the word of God and Mr. Wesley to those who were willing to hear it."

"Are you a convert, Stephen?"

A spark finally caught the paper and produced a dim flame. "No. Born into it. My father walked the shores of Lake Superior with the blessed Peter Marksman. After that he



was a native preacher in missions all around the country. My mother placed Wesley's Catechisms 1 and 2 in my crib, in English and in Cherokee. I have followed in my father's footsteps almost literally. I came home to take a sabbath rest from the work and from the walk."

Mortimer pressed the words out. "Preacher, I wish your aim had been true."

"Don't worry Mr. Mortimer No Name, we will both be dead by Christmas."

The preacher's prophecy proved false. Through the winter two men were released every Wednesday to chop firewood. And every Saturday Bartholomew took his sons out for a day hunt. When they had succeeded in a kill, the cellar would open on Sunday morning with Abe or Rob standing at the opening with a shotgun dangling at his elbow. Sundays were for dragging, butchering, and salting the meat and were rewarded with a shotgun barrel in the back and a tray of Jonnie bread to share in darkness for two days. During the dark days in the cellar, Stephen and Mortimer talked. Their talk kept them sane until spring.

"Mud is thawing in patches in the yard, preacher."

"I know it. They won't need us to chop firewood much longer. And we have salted enough barrels of venison to last them for years."

"But I'm not ready for hell yet, preacher."

"How many times do I have to tell you that the Lord is a gracious and loving God? All you need to do is ask for forgiveness for your adultery and repent."

Mortimer whispered, "That doesn't make sense. He's not that stupid."

Abe waited a moment at the threshold. "I do like bear. How big is it?"

"Empty words, preacher. I can utter any word I want to, but it doesn't take away the guilt. How can I repent when the sin is in my blood? You were the one who convinced me that my father's 'love' in Philadelphia was not my mother."

"I shared my theory with you to help ease your gnawing guilt."

"Yet despite your good intentions, my guilt is more intense because of it. Your theory made my sin inescapable and therefore repenting is hopeless. And even so, how could I repent from my sin while I am buried down here with you?"

Silence lingered in the darkness. "I can get you back to your Miss Violet so that you can repent." He reached out in the darkness to find his friend's shoulders. "I have a plan."

Stephen recovered from the shock of the tale and approached Mortimer and dead

Abe. "The following Sunday morning Abe raised the cellar door with a loud creak. The

"Looks like you boys is gonna hafta oil them hinges. Gotten rustier over the winter."

Mortimer whispered to Stephen, "He doesn't have his gun. We'll have to wait until next Sunday."

"There may not be a next Sunday," he whispered. "Is that you Abe? Can you come down here and give us a hand? When we were chopping wood last Wednesday and a boar crossed our path and Mortimer here killed it with his axe."

"Why dint you tell pa?"

"I'm sorry about that. We've been so hungry that we thought we could sneak it down here on our own. And Abe, that wasn't right of us."

Mortimer whispered, "That doesn't make sense. He's not that stupid."

Abe waited a moment at the threshold. "I do like boar. How big is it?"

"Oh it's big, real big. Too heavy for us."

"All right, I'll help ye." When Abe reached the bottom of the stairs Stephen jumped him from the side and put his arm around the boy's neck. Abe fought back viciously flailing and kicking Stephen in the shins with the heels of his boots. Mortimer was paralyzed with confusion until Abe bit Stephen's arm. Stephen shouted and released his hold. Abe screamed, "Pa! Rob!" Stephen stumbled backward and fell. Abe turned to run up the stairs. Mortimer leapt forward, grabbed Abe's feet and dragging his body, his face bouncing off the stairs. The boy was stunned by the hard fall and lay face down on the floor. Mortimer turned him over, put a knee on the boy's sternum, placed his thumbs on the boy's throat, and pushed.

Stephen recovered from the shock of the bite and approached Mortimer and dead Abe. "They will be out here any minute. Let's carry the body and use him as a shield. The surprise may gain us the time we need to get to one of the others."

"But they'll be enraged."

"That will buy us time, too. They won't be thinking straight at the sight of Abe's body. One of us can hold Abe and other can sneak out unnoticed and flank them before their heads are on straight."

Both men looked down at the dead boy for a few seconds. Mortimer uttered the obvious, "He is too big."

"No, he weighs no more than a deer and we have been dragging them all winter."

Then they heard Abe's twin calling his name in the yard.

"Your plan is to lift the dead fool and hold him up in front of you, not drag him like a deer."



Rob's call grew louder.

Mortimer spoke again, "He is going to have his gun."

"Abe! Abe! What are you doin' down there with 'em fools?"

Stephen raised his eyes from the dead boy to his friend. "Mortimer, get behind me." Without waiting for a response, he started up the stairs. Mortimer protested but followed as he was commanded. As they emerged, they saw that Rob was only ten feet away from the mouth of the cellar.

"Where's Abe? And why you hidin' behind the injun, you yankee pile of shit?"

When they realized Rob was not armed, Mortimer split off to one side. Mortimer and Stephen walked briskly toward Rob attempting to flank him on both sides. "Abe is down in the cellar. He had an accident."

"Accident? Accident! What did ya' do to Abe? I swear I will go get my rifle and shoot you right now."

Mr. Bartholomew emerged from the house with his own shotgun pointed at the pair slowly approaching his son. "You aren't in a position to make threats Rob, now step back you fool. How many times do I have to tell you to carry your rifle around those two at all times?"

"Pa, they did sumpin to Abe! Lemme go get my gun so I can shoot 'em!"

Stephen and Mortimer were now five feet from Rob.

"Son, let's find out what they did first. If they hurt your brother, then shootin' them might be too kind a way out."

Three feet. Stephen and Mortimer both lunged for Rob, Mortimer at Rob's knees and Stephen at his shoulders. Before they could take the boy down, Mr. Bartholomew fired two shots. Three bodies fell into a pile in the mud. Only one retained a head.

Mr. Bartholomew trotted out into the yard and poked the bodies with the barrel of his gun. "He's dead. You god damned yankee. My boy is dead!" Mr. Bartholomew's face was distorted and red with rage. "Now get up." He spat on Mortimer's face. "You've got three more graves to dig."

"Four."

Mr. Bartholomew's gun barrel drifted with his eyes toward the cellar. Mortimer seized the opportunity, grabbed the barrel, and wrenched the gun away from his captor. Mr. Bartholomew lost his balance and fell into the cold mud next to Mortimer. Both men were lying on their sides facing each other.

"Give me back my gun. There are no more shots anyway. You'll have a running start while I get a new cartridge--"

Mortimer raised the rifle and rammed the stock into Bartholomew's throat.

Harriet and Violet sat silently in the Apjohn parlor embroidering the church's wedding altar cloth. "Thank you for your help, Miss Bostwick. Your needlework is impeccable."

"Thank you, Mrs. Apjohn."

"Harriet, dear. Please call me Harriet. After all, soon we will both be 'Mrs. Apjohn' and we will need a way to distinguish ourselves." They both laughed half-heartedly. No word had come from Mortimer all winter.

and do They worked on in silence for a few minutes before Violet broke it. "And please call me Violet." She paused. "Father said that the farmers almanac promised a wet spring."

"That should do wonders for the green beans, I expect. For the whole farm."

They worked in silence for several minutes before Violet spoke again.

"Mrs. Palmer was wonderful last fall, wasn't she?"

"She certainly was. I wonder if she will ever pass this way again."

"Mrs. Palmer had a profound effect on me, Mrs.-- Harriet."

"That warms my heart, dear. Do you think Mortimer would have liked her sermon?" Harriet noticed that Violet had stopped her stitching to stare out the window.

"What's out in the yard, dear?"

"Oh nothing. I have applied for admission to Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in Massachusetts."

After a minute, the elder woman responded, "I am sure that Mortimer would be very proud of you, dear. Just as I am." Harriet put her needles on the end table and reached over to rest her hand on Violet's. Violet returned the gesture and they sat in silence until dusk.

After his captor had finished breathing, Mortimer got up from the mud, removed Mr. Bartholomew's boots and put them on his own feet. He walked up to the house and opened the front door. Mrs. Bartholomew sat in rocking chair knitting. She did not look up at Mortimer while he rifled through the kitchen cabinets stuffing Jonnie bread, jerky,



and dried green beans into the pockets of Mr. Bartholomew's coat that he was now wearing.

"I'm going north to the Ohio."

"Goodbye."

When Mortimer reached the banks of the Ohio River, he found a pine thick with branches and climbed it. Ten feet off the ground and safe from predators he relaxed and reached into his pockets for the green beans. He ate them slowly watching the river flow westward. When the sun rose the next morning he descended from his perch, stood on the river's bank, took a long look at the wide Ohio, and followed its flow.

### The Search for Authenticity in Historical Fiction

After choosing historical fiction as the genre for the creative portion my thesis, I immediately encountered a simple but significant problem: how to define it. Is it a fictionalized account of an historical event? If so, is it populated with invented characters or with people who actually lived through the event? Can the fiction embrace a marginal figure and expand her slice of history into a viable, imagined narrative? Can an author claim a well-known historical human as a character and transform him into a fictional hero? How long ago in the past does the story need to be set in order to qualify as historical?

My questions are not original. Scholars, teachers, and writers who are interested in the genre have wrestled with the definition of historical fiction for decades. In his book *The Forms of Historical Fiction: Sir Walter Scott and his Successors*, Harry Shaw suggests two answers to the questions I raised above:

...[historical novels] may represent societies, modes of speech, or events that in very fact existed in the past, in which case their probability points outward from within the work, such as providing a reader an entry into the past, in which their probability points inward to the design of the work itself. (21)

I hope that this short story has done as Shaw describes. In short, I hope to provide the reader an entry into the world of a mid-19th century Methodist.

Rhona Martin teaches would-be historical fiction novelists on the best techniques of creating such works in her *Writing Historical Fiction*. She instructs: "to carry on the conviction, [the] characters and the situation in which they find themselves must be of the era in which they live. They must think, act, live and breathe in the way appropriate to

their time" (3). I have attempted to follow the advice of Martin by varying modes of dialogue based on age, geography, and circumstance. Out of my research of primary documents, I included nuggets of historical news that these fictional characters might have valued or at least would have been aware.

Margaret Atwood published a speech she delivered in 1996, regarding Canadian historical fiction, in which she raises questions on how individual memory and collective memory interact both with history and historical fiction. She stated that "...there can be no history, and no novel either, without memory of some sort; but when it comes right down to it, how reliable is memory itself--our individual memory, or our collective memory as a society?" (9). Her address to a specific national fiction suggests that a quality historical fiction must have parameters.

My creative approach to this project aligns with each of these three ideas. However, as I analyze my own story as it compares to other works of historical fiction, I propose that the genre must not only respect probability and accuracy as Shaw and Martin suggest, or that memory and history cannot be completely accurate as Atwood acknowledges. I put forward that historical fiction must engage the era deliberately. That is, how can I write a story set in 1863-64 without including the issues that mattered to those who lived at that time?

That said, this story is largely lacking in a stance on slavery. I made this choice deliberately. As I read through primary documents that I will comment on below and drew upon my own knowledge of the period, I had great difficulty commenting on the institution of American slavery without using a heavy hand. Obviously, slavery was the primary issue in 1863. I chose not to add my voice to that chorus. The characters in this



story are not slaveholders; they are not abolitionists; they are not people of African descent trapped in the institution of slavery. Instead, I chose to have my characters live on the outskirts of this primary issue 1863. My goal for historical engagement in this story was to address the position of Native Americans and womens rights, especially in the church. With the stamp of "June 30, 1863" as the opening of the story, I trust that the reader will understand that institutional slavery and the American Civil War loom between the lines of the rest of the piece. I hope that the rare if any mention of these prominent contemporary issues creates a tension for the reader that will suggest possible tensions that the average white northerners might have felt.

My definition of historical fiction as a fictional work that engages the issues of an era in the past applies to many if not all examples of the genre. Nineteenth century examples of the genre include Nathaniel Hawthornes *The Scarlet Letter*, James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, and Walter Scott's *Waverley* novels. Each of these works engage social or political issues relevant to the time period during which they are set. Hawthorne comments on 17th century New England puritan justice. Cooper explores the complicated nuances of human relationships within the context of the expansion of 18th century European colonialism in North America. Scott's title character has his life shaped by events in English and Scottish history. Dickens explores what it might have been like to be a non-aristocrat during the French Revolution who suddenly had significant power to change the course of her country's history. None of these novels can live outside of the author's chosen era. As Atwood describes characters in historical fiction, "...each [character]... exists within a context, a fictional world comprised of geology, weather, economic forces, social classes,

cultural references, and wars and plagues and such big public events" (3-4). And Shaw states efficiently, "...in historical novels history is...foregrounded" (21). My story also qualifies as historical fiction as its characters cannot be transplanted outside of 1863.

These are novels, and I had planned to write a short story. I was unsure whether or not I could engage an era in this form. Dr. Parker guided me to two collections of short stories that do fit my definition of the genre. In her collection *Various Antidotes*, Joanna Scott recreates the stories of historical figures who had influence on contemporary events yet remain on the fringes of recorded history. In her collection *Close Ranges: Wyoming Stories*, Annie Proulx engages the history of Wyoming in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries through narratives of fictional characters in that era. Her stories may not directly comment on larger issues of their time period, but the setting of Wyoming is so important and so rich that it serves as the anchor to the era for each story.

After reading through a few stories in each collection, I was confident that the short story form could be used for historical fiction. But it was clear that to effectively and efficiently devise authentic characters whose stories help the reader engage the era, I could not rely on my pre-existing and somewhat basic knowledge of the American Civil War. And so I considered three core details of my characters had already established: Mortimer, Harriet and Violet are living through the American Civil War, they are from Pennsylvania, and they are Methodist. I asked myself, "What might it have like to be a Methodist in Pennsylvania in the first half of the nineteenth century?" I scoured an anthology of primary sources from the Methodist Episcopal Church. The contents of these documents inspired many fictional ideas that became essential in late drafts. The letters and official documents highlighted three prominent issues that the Methodist



Episcopal Church debated from 1820-1860: slavery and the church (although as discussed above I chose not to explicitly address this issue in the story), the woman's role in the church, and missions to Native American communities.

After reading through these sources, the richness of character and relationships within my story improved considerably. Violet was no longer just a fiancée that Mortimer longed to return home to while he sat bored in army camp; she became a budding champion of women's rights within the Methodist Episcopal Church. Harriet was no longer just a sad mother and widow who was vulnerable financially; she became a mother whose faith helps her to encourage her son with a difficult decision and bond with her future daughter-in-law. Stephen was no longer a novelty character as a Christian Indian; he became a character influenced by at least one generation of Native American converts to Christianity. Mortimer's demise was no longer a simple descent into madness. Instead through his own actions, he transforms from an idealistic emerging missionary to man so disillusioned by his own sin that he chooses to abandon his mother and fiancée.

Creating authenticity in the Bartholomews proved to be a challenge. As I progressed through early drafts, one plot element became non-negotiable: Mortimer would be captive at or near the end of the story. In order to reach that point, I had to devise a character capable of that evil, thus Mr. Bartholomew. However, I wanted to avoid making him one dimensional. To that end, the reader would follow the perspective of Mortimer as he discovers his danger gradually. Additionally, the brief affair with Mrs. Bartholomew served the possible motivation for Mr. Bartholomew. In early drafts, Mrs. Bartholomew was morally pure, and she was a victim of abuse. I decided that these two elements made her character shallow. Thus, I added a progression of her relationship with



Mortimer that changed from curiosity to infatuation to consensual sex to cold indifference.

Regionalism is a potential danger, as well. I needed Mortimer to believe at first that he had been saved by the Bartholomews after a confederate attack. I chose Kentucky as the location because it was a disputed border state, thus enabling the possibility that Mortimer might assume that he had been a victim of a confederate ambush. Also, the idea that Mortimer and Stephen might be held captive without anyone knowing required the Bartholomews to live in relative isolation, thus the choice to place their home in the Appalachian Mountains. But my goal was to avoid the amoral mountain people trope. To that end, I chose to have Mrs. Bartholomew speak with little to no accent, Mr. Bartholomew to speak with a small accent, and the boys to speak with a heavy accent. My intent is that the reader might determine that Mr. and Mrs. Bartholomew have moved to Kentucky from the north. I hope these elements of the Bartholomews character and location create for a plausible situation that the reader can buy into.

Another attempt to increase plausibility was my choice to create a partial epistolary. Historical research is built upon a foundation of primary source documents. Letters are particularly attractive when an historian is attempting to establish the persona of a figure from the past. Letters are the historian's closest link to the true personality and motives of an historical figure. However, the content of a letter does not always represent fact. The person may have chosen to veil the truth. While this question presents problems for the historian, it can be a fertile source of interesting layers of characterization for a fiction writer. In early drafts and discussions with Dr. Parker, I was intrigued by the possibilities of characters presenting their life circumstances and their very selves falsely.

However, as I read more letters from the era, I was more intrigued by the simplicity of information exchange through this medium. The result in this story is a somewhat honest account of events and thoughts between Mortimer his two relationships at home. With the notion of veiled truth put on the back burner, I decided to use the letter exchange as a source of confusion, especially in terms of the delay in delivery. I had been considering that Mortimer's father may have had an extramarital affair and how it might affect Mortimer's faith, and I decided to introduce the idea through a confusing exchange of letters.

In addition to the content of the letters, I was intrigued by the plot function of the actual exchange. I decided that when Mortimer became a captive, the letter exchange to his mother must cease without his knowledge. And as the letters were tossed down into the cellar the reader confirms with Mortimer that his separation from his mother and from the world has been sealed. By using a partial epistolary form in conjunction with conducting research into the issues that might have been present in the minds of my characters, I hope that I achieved my goal of creating a compelling story populated by complex characters that authentically engages a particular historical era.

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